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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 003382

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ET](#) [ELEC](#) [UNREST](#)

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: CUD COUNCIL DISTANCES ITSELF FROM HAILU SHAWEL'S COMMENTS

Classified By: Charge Vicki Huddleston for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (SBU) Summary. On September 21, the CUD, Ethiopia's largest opposition coalition, issued a statement that distances the CUD Council from provocative comments made by Coalition Chairman Hailu Shawel in Washington. The CUD statement notes that Shawel's comments, which included a commitment to boycott Parliament and a call for the GOE's resignation, do not reflect the official position of the coalition. The CUD communique further states that the CUD will make the decision on whether to join parliament in conjunction with addressing broader political concerns. Hailu Shawel's declarations in the U.S. have been portrayed by the state-owned media as reflecting CUD's position, however, and have added to a sense of confusion and division within the opposition. At the same time, demonstrations called by the opposition for October 2 in Addis Ababa, along with allegations of increased harassment of opposition members by the government, have heightened tension and increased political polarization. End Summary.

Chairman Hailu: We Will Boycott and Bring This Government Down

¶2. (SBU) In separate appearances at a press conference at Washington's National Press Club, a town hall meeting with the Diaspora, and an interview with VOA, CUD Chairman Hailu Shawel reportedly stated that Ethiopia's elections had been fraudulent. He indicated that his party (the All Ethiopian Unity Party, the largest component of the CUD coalition) would not join parliament, which is scheduled to convene in early October. Hailu also stated that the opposition's constituents had clearly told their leadership that they should not accept the results of the elections. He was also critical of Western governments (including the US and the UK) that have called on the opposition to take its seats in parliament. In addition, Hailu again put forward the idea of a transitional government, a concept which the ruling party has repeatedly rejected. In response to a question about what the USG should do, he said that the US should inform the government that they had lost the election and must relinquish power. Hailu answered another question by saying, "No guns will be used. Not a single bullet will be shot. But we will bring this government down."

CUD In Addis: Hailu Doesn't Speak For Us

¶3. (SBU) The state-owned media reported Hailu's statements as the official position of the CUD concerning Parliament. In response, the CUD Council issued a press release on September 21. The press release clearly notes that the statement given by Hailu Shawel is his personal opinion and not that of the CUD Council. It states that that the CUD Council has not yet to take a position on whether to join the Parliament. However, it stresses that the real issue is not parliamentary participation, but rather "whether a democratic system could prevail in our country." The CUD statement argues that preventing the country from being "dragged into political chaos" and pushing the ruling party to accept opposition's recommendations on democratic reforms are the most important political questions. The release states that these issues must be addressed in conjunction with the opposition's decision on whether to join parliament. The press release indicates that the CUD will make its decision "after assessing the country's political problems, the democratic processes and subsequent steps in close collaboration with allied opposition parties." During a separate press conference on September 21, CUD and UEDF leaders criticized the government for what they called illegal and undemocratic activities, including harassment and destruction of property of opposition leaders and members.

Opposition Stumbles Forward, Hoping for a Miracle

¶4. (C) Comment: It has become common for opposition leaders to take more radical positions while consulting with the Ethiopian Diaspora in the U.S. than they do when they are in Addis Ababa. Shawel's comments may have been designed to appeal to financial backers in the U.S. -- or to younger, more radical CUD members in Ethiopia who are eager to confront the EPRDF head on. His comments would almost certainly get him arrested in Addis Ababa, and have roiled

opposition ranks just as the CUD is set to meet this weekend to form a new, "unified" party from current coalition members. Local sources tell post that other opposition leaders remain divided on whether to take their parliamentary seats. A large number of MPs-elect have picked up their credentials, and the CUD has taken a number of steps to prepare for assuming authority over Ethiopia's capital, but opposition leaders Berhanu Nega and Marera Gudina continue to say that they will boycott Parliament unless the GOE improves the democratic climate. Plans for a large protest on October 2 continue apace.

HUDDLESTON